

SETTING THE STANDARD FOR SUCCESSFUL E-LEARNING IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

SUMMARY

Industry

Local Government

Client

The London Borough of Brent

The Challenge

To integrate e-learning into the council's learning and development portfolio; track personal and professional development; cut costs and classroom training days; provide flexible training to colleagues through an online learning portal accessible from home or office.

The Solution

Customise the standard Course-Source LMS offered via Learning Pool. This enabled Brent's HR and Diversity department to track, administer and report back on learning in ways to suit them and enable the council to develop and host bespoke training courses.

The Benefits

The London Borough of Brent is able to offer colleagues flexible ways to learn, without being restricted by the limited availability of classroom-based training courses. Cost and time savings have been made and the council received a prestigious e-learning award for their work from e-learning age magazine.



“ The low entry cost combined with the high level of functionality and flexibility of the Course-Source portal contributed significantly to the success of this project.”

Princess Francis, Corporate Learning and Development Officer, London Borough of Brent.



Back in 2005, the Human Resources and Diversity department within the London Borough of Brent made the decision to research e-learning, to discover how feasible and effective it would be for the borough. Key responsibility fell to Princess Francis, the borough's Corporate Learning and Development Officer, whose first call was to Learning Pool, the

e-learning community created to assist local authorities looking to create and access e-learning.

Two years earlier, Learning Pool had commissioned Course-Source to provide their online e-learning Portal and Learning Management System (LMS) to enable them to offer councils across the country access to e-learning on a wide range of IT and work-specific topics. Learning Pool advised Brent to use the online portal and link up with Course-Source as part of a pilot project to see how effective the Course-Source LMS would be. An early result was the creation of a dedicated area within the portal Brent could use to improve management access to the learning activities of Brent's staff.

“E-learning is a cost effective, quick and flexible way of ensuring staff receive relevant training. For a start up cost of just £5,500 Brent managed to roll out e-learning across the council. It also made full use of technology tracking features allowing individuals to keep a record of their own learning and for progress across the organisation”

Peter Williams,
Editor, e-learning age

“The pilot worked very well and encouraged us to embrace e-learning,” says Princess Francis. “We found the LMS side was invaluable for managers to check the performance of their staff and offer support and feedback. It’s also great for us to use as part of our corporate reporting to assess how effective e-learning and the courses have been.”

After the pilot, Brent chose to stick with the Course-Source LMS and refine it to better suit specific needs. A standalone virtual learning environment with Brent’s own in-house branding was created and additional e-learning courses joined those from the Learning Pool.

“We consulted with managers and staff to get their views and got a lot of feedback from them as well as our HR colleagues,” she recalls. “Although the standard Learning Pool LMS was really good – we were very happy with the level of reporting we were receiving - at a corporate level we wanted more specific reports. So, we introduced an online evaluation form for learners to complete at the end of each course, linking that information into our management system, so we in HR had access to that information, as did learners’ managers. We made e-certificates available at the end of courses too, so training delegates had proof of completion akin to an attendance certificate. We also asked CS to link e-learning to performance management, so we knew that people were only doing

courses that linked specifically to their areas of responsibility. “

Ironically, Princess had to ask Course-Source to make a further change simply because the e-learning initiative was so successful.

“People got so excited about e-learning! We piloted it to around 100 people initially and the take up was so good we asked Course-Source to design the system so that when someone made a course request, rather than it being automatically available to them, an email would be sent to their line manager, who would first have to approve their eligibility for that course. We were concerned people should only complete courses specific to their needs and didn’t use e-learning in the wrong way. We didn’t want them to get so enthusiastic that they began taking superfluous courses that didn’t link to their role or their personal development.”

It seemed part of the appeal was the instant accessibility of e-learning courses, with no need to wait for classroom or facilitator courses to become available. E-learning also proved particularly advantageous for colleagues working shifts, unsociable hours or part time, who benefited from the online nature of the Course-Source LMS. The ‘Introduction to Local Government’ course has proved particularly popular – the council has just received a new updated version – as has an effective writing course, which

Princess has had very good feedback on.

She is convinced the investment in e-learning has proved to be worth every penny.

“We have seen key benefits, especially around the new e-induction course we developed. We know having good induction procedures for new staff is vital – if you don’t get this right you’re looking at much higher staff turnover rates. Although we have retained our corporate classroom-based induction course, this only runs once a month and the dates are not always convenient for everyone. Now, all new staff complete the new course within their first week of joining the council. This has been very valuable. It means everyone has key information about the council right from the start.”

“Crucially, adopting a blended learning approach has meant cutting down in terms of training delivery days. We’ve definitely made cost savings there. Courses such as equality and diversity for instance; previously these were two-day courses. Now, we’ve replaced much of the knowledge-based learning with e-learning and spent more time focusing on skills-based training in a one-day, practical training workshop. This saves time and money.”

So, does Princess see a strong future for e-learning within the London Borough of Brent?

“Absolutely, although not as a standalone project. None of our training has been replaced entirely by e-learning but we have cut back radically on traditional learning methods. Our approach is always a blended learning approach. We would never say to someone ‘just do an e-learning course’ but want them to use e-learning in combination with classroom learning. We always think now: ‘how can we introduce e-learning for this training initiative?’ And, if we can use e-learning, we do. “

Princess says she and her colleagues have built up a good relationship with Course-Source consultants who have provided ideas and best practice advice on how Brent’s system can be improved. She feels this relationship was a key factor in Brent’s winning an award for their e-learning from e-learning Age magazine.

“We were joint first with an NHS project under ‘Best e-learning Production on a low budget,’ “ she says. “The magazine’s Editor had some lovely words to say: ‘for a start up cost of just £5,500 Brent managed to roll out e-learning across the council. It also made full use of technology tracking features allowing individuals to keep a record of their own learning and for progress across the organisation.’ It was a great accolade for us.”

“ We found the LMS side was invaluable for managers to check the performance of their staff and offer support and feedback. It’s also great for us to use as part of our corporate reporting to assess how effective e-learning and the courses have been ”

“ We always think now: ‘how can we introduce e-learning for this training initiative?’ And, if we can use e-learning, we do ”

Princess Francis,
Corporate Learning and
Development Officer,
London Borough of Brent.

For more information call Course-Source on:

020 7689 9700

Course-Source Website:

www.course-source.net



course-source

Quality e-learning Sensibly Priced

For more information call Course-Source on

020 7689 9700

www.course-source.net